

Testimony of

Chief Phillip D. Morse, Sr.
United States Capitol Police

before the

Committee on House Administration
U.S. House of Representatives

Regarding the Capitol Visitor Center
Visitor Experience

Chairman Brady, Congressman Ehlers, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the security aspect of the visitor experience at the Capitol Visitor Center (CVC).

The opening of the Capitol Visitor Center next year will mark the achievement of a long held goal of the United States Capitol Police. In 1998, after the fatal shooting of Officer Jacob Chestnut and Detective John Gibson in the United States Capitol, planning for the Capitol Visitor Center began in earnest. Since that time, the U.S. Capitol Police has worked in partnership with the Architect of the Capitol to help design the CVC in such a manner as to not only enhance and enrich the visitor's experience, but also enhance the security of the United States Capitol. As the construction of the facility progresses and we prepare for its opening, it is clear that both goals will be achieved.

The main advantage that the CVC presents from a security perspective is the ability for the U.S. Capitol Police to conduct security screening of visitors in a state-of-the-art facility that was designed for that purpose. As we saw in 1998, the historic and ceremonial entrances of the Capitol were never intended to support the security screening that is necessary in today's threat environment. The opening of the CVC, with its entryways custom-designed to support security equipment, police officer positioning, and technology to detect and contain threats, all in a seamless welcoming environment, will serve to enhance the visitor experience while mitigating current and emerging threats.

A key issue that remains for discussion is the manner in which tours will be conducted. The United States Capitol Police will yield to the expertise of Ms. Terrie

Rouse, Chief Executive Officer for the Visitor Services for the Capitol Visitor Center, and her team to formulate the best possible visitor experience. Our interest is in the area of response to emergencies that affect tour groups.

The events of September 11th, 2001, and subsequent evacuations, lock-downs and other security events at the Capitol, have demonstrated a need for the United States Capitol Police to limit the number of people in the Capitol at any given time and also have a means to give instructions to building occupants, including tour groups, in an emergency situation. When the Capitol Visitor Center opens in November, we will have the opportunity to merge the constituent service of staff led tours with the professional presentation provided by the Capitol Guide Service. The concept of staff integrated tours led by a member of the Capitol Guide Service will allow the United States Capitol Police to better regulate the flow of visitors into the Capitol thereby eliminating over crowding and congestion in the hallways. Further, since we will be able to maintain positive communications contact with the tour guides as they move with their groups throughout the building, we can provide real time direction during an emergency such as evacuating a certain route or relocating to a safe location depending on the threat. The U.S. Capitol Police will provide training to the tour guides that include evacuation routes and procedures, assembly areas outside of the Capitol, familiarization with building lockdown procedures, and areas within the building to relocate groups in response to various threats. This training, combined with the concept of staff-integrated tours, will ensure those who lead tour groups within the Capitol can offer an informative, safe experience for our guests and your constituents.

Again, thank you for the invitation to appear before you today. As you know, one of my responsibilities is to provide advice and guidance on security related matters so that the committees of jurisdiction can make decisions and set policy based on the totality of circumstances. The United States Capitol Police is committed to providing the highest level of security and law enforcement services while exercising the will of Congress to balance visitor access and security within the Capitol Complex.

That concludes my testimony Mr. Chairman, I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

